DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 442 578 PS 028 671

AUTHOR DiBlassio, Jamie; Calore, Kristen; Chambliss, Catherine
TITLE The Association between Various Shared Activities and the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Higher Education; *Parent Child Relationship; Parent Participation; *Parents; Questionnaires; Undergraduate Students; *Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS *Family Activities; *Relationship Quality

ABSTRACT

This study examined the association between various shared activities and the quality of parent-child relationships. Participating in the study were 211 undergraduate students attending a small liberal arts college. They completed a questionnaire in which they rated the quality of their relationship with their parents, the amount of contact they had with their parents, and the activities shared with mothers and with fathers when the participants were young children. A summary score for quality of relationship with mother and a separate score for quality of relationship with father were calculated. Median splits were performed on both summary scores, distinguishing between those with high quality relationships and those with low quality relationships with each of their parents. T-tests were performed to compare these two groups in terms of involvement in 22 shared activities between parents and children, such as driving to lessons, watching sports, putting child to bed, watching television, doing homework, exercising, cooking, vacationing, eating breakfast, eating dinner, participating in holiday events, and gardening. The findings indicated that there were significant differences between the two groups on almost all the scores for shared activities with the mother (except camping) and the father (except going to museums and zoos). The results offer strong support for the idea that shared activities with young children are associated with more positive relationships with parents during late adolescence and early adulthood. The type of shared activity did not seem to matter. (KB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 442 578

The Association Between Various Shared Activities and the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

Jamie DiBlassio
Kristen Calore

Catherine Chambliss, Ph.D.

Ursinus College

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Catherine Chambliss

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

PS 028671

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This study attempted to determine the association between various shared activities and the quality of parent-child relationships. Two hundred and eleven undergraduate students attending a small liberal arts college completed a questionnaire. A median split was performed on all of the cases in order to distinguish between those with high quality relationships and those with low quality relationships with each of their parents. T-tests were performed to compare these two groups in terms of involvement in 22 shared activities. Only shared activity with the mother and one shared activity with the father were not significant out of the 22 total shared activities; significant differences emerged between the groups on all the other variables assessed.

The Association Between Shared Activities

And the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

Parents are truly the first teachers of their children. Recent advances in brain research inform us that the first years of life are critical in terms of determining the subsequent learning capacities of our children (Sylwester, 1994). Much can be done to help make the most out of the first years of their children's lives. It is important to help parents understand that their job is to "turn on" receptors in their young children's brains, by providing stimulating contact and opportunities for mastery.

Toward this end, parents are frequently enjoined to interact more broadly and consistently with their young children. It is often assumed that sharing a wider variety of activities with children will produce several benefits.

Spending time together, while engaged in common pursuits, conveys respect and concern for the child, which can help children to feel valued. This is advantageous because it facilitates development of the child's self esteem. Self esteem enables children to accept challenges with confidence, to approach new situations with optimism, and to resist negative influences with strength and conviction.

Sharing activities is also educational in a narrower sense, fostering development of new specific skills and providing children with opportunities to practice and refine abilities already in their repertoires. Joint pursuits enable parents to reinforce competencies they value, whether they be linguistic, cognitive, motoric, or interpersonal. Sharing activities also permits parents to serve as influential role models. Children

eagerly imitate those whom the perceive to be powerful, nurturant, and similar to themselves (Bandura, 1969); parents tend to possess all these characteristics.

Since parents play a key role in socializing their young children, extensive contact with children during their early years can facilitate their internalization of the expectations and standards of their family and community. This benefits the child by easing their transition beyond the home and increasing their success in meeting the various demands of teachers and peers. Well socialized children are more likely to function competently with others. They relate to others with higher levels of empathy, patience, fairness, and personal responsibility, all of which are conducive to greater social effectiveness.

While it is obviously important to foster the development of children's self esteem, to build specific competencies, and to induct children into the broader culture by transmitting commonly held values, sharing activities with one's children is also assumed to be critical to the establishment of a high quality, mutually reinforcing relationship between parent and child. Most parents seek a lasting close, positive, and respectful relationship with their children. Activities shared during the early years are thought to serve as a foundation for the child's later relationships with mother and father. Therefore, parents who value eventually having a high quality relationship with their child after he or she becomes and adult, are generally encouraged to invest time and energy during their child's early years in order to foster the following relationship features: 1) clear and open communication, 2) mutual admiration and affection, and 3) trust and a sense of loyalty.

Research on the actual consequences of spending time with young children will help to clarify its importance. Knowledge gleaned from such studies will help parents make more informed decisions about how to allocate their limited time and energy.

Short-term effects of parents' sharing time have been demonstrated in the academic sphere. Parental involvement has been touted for years as a very important predictor of student achievement in schools. In recent surveys, teachers have emphasized the need to increase parental involvement, based on their perception of a link to children's success in school. Strengthening parents' roles in the learning of their children has been identified by teachers as an issue that should receive the highest public education policy priority (Louis Harris and Associates, 1993).

According to Vandergrift and Greene (1992), parental involvement has two independent components: parents as supporters and parents as active partners. Parents can be active, yet not supportive of the education process. They also can be supportive but not active at the school. Ideally, parent should be both supportive and active, but this often is difficult when both parents work outside the home, or when there is only one parent in the home. Within the school, for example, parental involvement takes on many forms. Fundraising for schools is just one way in which parents may be involved in the education of their children. Moreover, parents can be directly involved in school management and through participation in special parenting training programs. On a more general note, parents can help children with their homework, support school activities by volunteering in classrooms and provide language-rich environments.

Parents and children are connected throughout their lives. Each generation experiences life course transitions, and these, in turn, influence the lives of the other

generation. Using data from the 1987-1988 and 1992-1994 waves of the National Survey of Families and Households, Kaufman and Uhlenberg (1998) examined how life course transitions experienced by each generation affect changes in the adult child-parent relationship (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). They discovered substantial variability in child-parent relationships. Approximately one fifth of relationships deteriorated, and one fifth improved over this time period. Parental divorce and declines in parents' health lead to deteriorating parent-child relationships. Furthermore, problems in a child's marriage also strain the adult parent-child relationship. These authors also found that gender had an important mediating effect on intergenerational relations, as evidenced by the differential effects on son-mother and daughter-father relationships of having children, changing work hours, and increasing distance.

Relatively few empirical investigations have specifically explored the association between the number of activities parents engage in with their young children and the overall quality of the child's subsequent relationship with their parents during the child's adult years. The present study assessed the frequency with which children shared various common activities with each of their parents, and measured several features of their relationships with their mothers and their fathers. The relationship between amount of shared activities and quality of feelings toward mothers and fathers was investigated by dividing the participants into high and low quality relationship groups, and comparing these groups in terms of earlier shared activities.

Methods

A questionnaire was developed to assess the quality of parent-child relationships and the amount of contact the participant had with each of his/her parents, as well as the

activities they shared with each. This questionnaire was administered to a total of 211 undergraduate students in an introductory Psychology course at a small liberal arts college located in the suburbs of Eastern Pennsylvania.

Results

Directionally adjusted scores were totaled for each participant, yielding a summary score for quality of relationship with mother and a separate score for quality of relationship with father. Median splits were performed on both summary scores, dividing participants with high quality relationships versus those with low quality relationships with each parent.

Between-group t-tests were used to compare the high and low quality relationship groups in terms of shared activity levels. It was found that all the shared activities aside from camping with mothers and going to museums with fathers were significantly associated with quality of relationships with both mothers and fathers. These shared activities included putting the child to bed, eating dinner together, watching the child play sports, and driving the child to lessons (see Tables 1 and 2).

Discussion

The results of this study offer strong support for the idea that shared activities with young children are associated with more positive relationships with parents later on. Type of shared activity did not seem to matter much; those with better relationships with parents reported greater involvement in virtually all types of activities assessed.

Given the correlational nature of this study, one cannot draw causal conclusions about the relationship between engaging in activities with parents and the later quality of parent-child relationships. It is important to keep in mind the possibility that children

who have better relationships with their parents because of more compatible temperaments and the like may elect to share more activities. In this case, increasing shared activities may not necessarily enhance the quality of the parent-child relationship. Additionally, activities associated with higher quality relationships may also be a result of the amount of contact a child has with his or her parents in general. Further research needs to be done in this area of study, before firm conclusions about the value of specific shared activities can be drawn.

TABLE 1

Shared Activities that Differentiate Between Children with High Versus Low Quality Relations with their Mothers

	t	df	p
Drove me to lessons, practices, etc.	4.36	209	.00**
Watching you perform sports	4.32	209	.00**
Putting me to bed	3.37	209	.00*
Reading	2.03	209	.04*
Watching TV	3.96	209	.00**
Doing homework	3.08	209	.00*
Gardening and lawn care	2.70	209	.00*
Fixing the car	2.72	209	.05
Watching me perform at art events	2.32	209	.02*
Exercise	4.66	208	.00**
Play sports	2.55	209	.01*
Shopping	3.33	209	.00**
Cooking	2.72	209	.01*
Going to movies	4.67	209	.00**
Vacations	3.19	209	.00*
Going to museums and zoos	3.62	209	.00**
Singing	3.51	209	.00*
Eating breakfast	3.25	209	.00*
Eating dinner	4.15	209	.00**
Holiday events	2.08	209	.04*

Shared Activities That Did Not Differentiate Between Children with High Versus Low Quality of Relationships with Their Mother

	t	df	p
Camping	1.73	209	n.s.

*p < .05

**p < .001

n.s. = not significant

TABLE 2

Shared Activities That Differentiate Between Children with High Versus Low Quality Relationships with Their Fathers

	t	df	p
Watching me perform at sports	6.76	208	.00**
Play Sports	4.97	208	.00**
Putting me to bed	4.95	208	.00**
Eating dinner	6.65	208	.00**
Reading	4.08	208	.00**
Watching TV	5.17	208	.00**
Doing homework	4.15	208	.00**
Drove me to lessons/practices/etc	3.44	208	.00*
Going out to eat	4.35	208	.00**
Gardening and lawn care	2.30	208	.02*
Fixing the car	3.34	208	.00*
Watching me perform at art events	3.10	208	.00*
Exercise	5.04	208	.00**
Shopping	4.68	208	.00**
Cooking	4.28	208	.00**
Going to movies	1.98	208	.05
Vacations	3.98	208	.00**
Holiday events	5.11	208	.00**
Singing	3.44	208	.00**
Eating breakfast	4.22	208	.00**
Camping	2.07	208	.04*

Shared Activities That Did Not Differentiate Between Children with High and Low Quality Relationships with Their Fathers

	t	df	p
Going to museums and zoos	1.72	208	n.s.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .001$

n.s. = n.s.

Bibliography

Fredericks, A. & Rasinski, T. (1990). "Working with parents: Involving the uninvolved-how to." The Reading Teacher, 43(6), 424-425.

Kaufman, G. & Uhlenberg, P. (1998). "Effects of life course transitions on the quality of relationships between adult children and their parents." Journal of Marriage and the Family, 60(4), 924-938.

Moore, E. (1991). "Improving schools through parental involvement." Principal, 71(1), 17-20.

Sylwester, R. (1993). "What the biology of the brain tells us about learning." Educational Learning, 51(4), 46-51.

Vandergrift, J. & Greene, A. (1992). "Rethinking parent involvement." Educational Learning, 50(1), 57-59.